

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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SAM-01 AID-05 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /075 W

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R 231020Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9773

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 0921

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN, PK

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN

1. SUMMARY: DURING A CALL I PAID TODAY ON FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN TO ELICIT HIS REACTION TO THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED BORDER TALKS WITH INDIA, I FOUND HIM MORE RELAXED ABOUT THE BORDER THAN AT ANY TIME IN RECENT WEEKS, LARGELY I ASSUME BECAUSE THERE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN NO MAJOR INCIDENTS SINCE JANUARY 19-20. HE EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE FARAKKA BARRAGE AND SAID THEY EXPECTED TO ISSUE A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT TONIGHT ON WATER PROBLEMS WHICH, I GATHER, WILL NOT CARRY BDG POSITION BEYOND PREVIOUS STAND THAT INDIA MUST CREATE THE PROPER ATMOSPHERE FOR WATER TALKS BY SOME REDUCTION IN ITS "UNILATERAL" WITHDRAWAL FROM THE GANGES AS AN EXPRESSION OF ITS GOOD FAITH. ON OTHER SUBJECTS, THE FOR IGN SECRETARY REFERRED TO GOOD PROGRESS IN DEVELOPMENT OF PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH RELATIONSHIP AND I USED OCCASION TO STRESS INCREASING IMPORTANCE WE ARE ATTACHING TO MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AND EFFECT ACTIONS IN MULTILATERAL FORA COULD HAVE ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

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2. BORDER PROBLEMS. ECHOING REACTION COMMODORE KHAN HAD GIVEN ME LAST WEEK ON RESULTS OF RECENT INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER TALKS, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THESE TALKS IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS HAD GONE REASONABLY WELL. HE SAID T GT ON THE FIRST DAY THERE HAD BEEN ALOT OF ACRIMONY WHEN INDIA HAD ACCUSED BANGLADESH OF USING ANTI-INDIAN ARTICLES IN THE BANGLADESH PRESS AS A WEAPON AGAINST THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT. THE BANGLADESH SIDE HAD POINTED OUT THAT NOTHING HAD BEEN IN THE PRESS ABOUT THE BORDER WHICH HAD NOT ALREADY BEEN KNOWN TO THE BANGLADESH PUBLIC AND ALSO THAT THE INDIANS MIGHT NOT APPRECIATE THE LIMITS OF THE CONTROL THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT EXERTED OVER BANGLADESH JOURNALISTS. WHILE TWO OF THE DACCA NEWSPAPERS WERE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED, OTHERS WERE NOT; AND EVEN IN THE CASE OF THE BDG-CONTROLLED NEWSPAPERS THERE WERE INDEPENDENT-MINDED JOURNALISTS (E.G., ENAYETULLAH KHAN) WHO WOULD NOT BE AMENABLE TO ACCEPTING DICTATION ABOUT WHAT LINE THEY SHOULD TAKE IN THE PRESS. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID HE AGREED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH SHOULD SHOW RESTRAINT IN WHAT WAS SAID ABOUT INDIA BUT THEY COULD NOT ENTIRELY RESTRICT THEIR PRESS. AFTER THIS PHASE OF THE TALKS, THE NEGOTIATIONS HAD PROCEEDED IN A BETTER VEIN AND HAD REACHED A SATISFACTORY CONCLUSION WITH AGREEMENT TO CONDUCT A JOINT INQUIRY INTO RECENT INCIDENTS. THE TEST, HE SAID, WOULD BE WHETHER THESE INCIDENTS WOULD NOW CEASE. HE SAID THE INDIANS HAD IN FACT PROPOSED THAT A JOINT COMMISSION BE ESTABLISHED BUT BDG HAD FELT THIS WAS TOO FORMAL AND WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A TEAM IN THE FIELD RATHER THAN PEOPLE SITTING IN NEW DELHI OR CALCUTTA ON A FORMAL COMMISSION. FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THERE HAD NOT BEEN ANY SERIOUS INCIDENTS SINCE THE TALKS CONCLUDED. HE SAID THAT THE FORMAL INVESTIGATION HAD NOT BEGUN YET BUT PREPARATIONS WERE UNDER WAY AND HE THOUGHT IT WOULD COMMENCE WITHIN THE FIFTEEN-DAY DEADLINE.

3. I TOLD THE FOREIGN SECRETARY IT WAS MY IMPRESSION THAT, FROM BDG POINT OF VIEW, BORDER ISSUE HAD REACHED A HIGH POINT BACK ON JANUARY 19-20 (SEE DACCA'S 0425) BUT THAT THE LEVEL OF TENSION HAD DECREASED SINCE THEN. FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THIS WAS A FAIR IMPRESSION. HE INDICATED THAT THERE HAD BEEN SPORADIC MINOR EPISODES BUT THAT

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GENERALLY THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY HAD BEEN REDUCED.

4. FARAKKA BARRAGE. FOREIGN SECRETARY THEN SWITCHED TO FARAKKA BARRAGE WHICH HE SAID HAD BECOME A SERIOUS PROBLEM. WHEN I ASKED HIM TO CLARIFY THE ASSERTION IN THE INDIAN OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT OF FEBRUARY 18 THAT THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAD PROPOSED TALKS ON THE WATER PROBLEM BUT THIS HAD BEEN REJECTED BY THE BDG, THE FOREIGN

SECRETARY EXPLAINED THAT THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAD SENT BDG A NOTE ON FEBRUARY 11 IN WHICH THEY HAD EXPRESSED READINESS TO TALK ABOUT THE ALLOCATION OF WATERS DURING THE LEAN SEASON ONLY AND HAD PROPOSED MOREOVER THAT THE TWO SIDES ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF THE AUGEMENTATION OF WATER SUPPLIES TO BANGLADESH THROUGH THE OPTIMUM UTILIZATION OF THE TOTAL WATER AVAILABLE TO BANGLADESH FROM ALL SOURCES. THIS WAS A REFERENCE TO INDIA'S IDEA THAT BANGLADESH SHOULD DIVERT WATER FROM THE BRAHMAPUTRA THROUGH A LINK CANAL TO THE GANGES AREA TO SUPPLEMENT THE WATER AVAILABLE BOTH IN INDIA AND IN BANGLADESH. THIS WAS AN UNSATISFACTORY PROPOSAL FOR BANGLADESH. IT WOULD MEAN AN EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE PROJECT WHICH WOULD USE UP LARGE AMOUNTS OF LAND IN BANGLADESH AND THE PROJECT IN ANY CASE WOULD BE SUBJECT TO INDIAN CONTROL SINCE THE BRAHMAPUTRA FLOWED INTO BANGLADESH FROM INDIA.

5. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID A KEY PROBLEM WAS TO DEFINE THE LEAN SEASON. IN ITS NOTE, HE SAID, INDIA HAD TAKEN THE POSITION THAT THE ONLY QUESTION THAT AROSE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WAS A DISCUSSION OF THE GANGES FLOW DURING THE LEAN SEASON, BUT THE CRUCIAL QUESTION WAS -- WHEN IS THE LEAN SEASON? INDIA TOOK THE POSITION THAT THIS SEASON WAS ONLY FROM MID-MARCH TO MID-MAY AND THAT ANY DISCUSSION OF THE FLOW AT ANY OTHER PERIOD WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THAT WHILE MID-MARCH TO MID-MAY NORMALLY HAD BEEN A CRITICAL PERIOD IN THE PAST WHEN THE FULL AMOUNT OF WATER WAS AVAILABLE, IT WAS POSSIBLE BY DIVERSION OF WATER AT FARAKKA TO INDUCE ARTIFICIALLY A "LEAN SEASON" WHICH COULD EXTEND FROM NOVEMBER TO MAY. THIS IN FACT WAS WHAT HAD HAPPENED THIS JANUARY, HE SAID. HE SAID THAT IN THEIR NOTE THEY HAD TAKEN THE POSITION THAT INDIAN ACTIONS WERE AT VARIANCE WITH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SPIRIT OF PRIOR UNDERSTANDINGS ON FARAKKA, AND HAD MADE THE POINT THAT ANY DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS COULD ONLY BE MEANINGFUL IF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA CREATED THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE FOR THE TALKS BY CEASING ITS UNILATERAL ACTIONS. HE SAID THEY DID NOT EXPECT INDIA TO CEASE ALTOGETHER THE OPERATION OF THE FEEDER CANAL TO THE HOOGHLY BUT WHAT WAS NECESSARY WAS AN ACTION TO REDUCE THIS FLOW WHICH WOULD DEMONSTRATE INDIA'S GOOD FAITH. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID HE EXPECTED THAT COMMODORE KHAN'S PEOPLE IN FLOOD CONTROL WOULD ISSUE A SPECIAL STATEMENT ON THE FARAKKA BARRAGE ISSUE TONIGHT BUT THOUGHT IT WOULD NOT GO BEYOND WHAT HE HAD JUST INDICATED TO ME.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DACCA 0921

6. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID HE WOULD ASK ME TO REPORT THIS ISSUE FULLY TO WASHINGTON, ADDING THAT THEY WOULD BE KEEPING ALL THEIR FRIENDS INFORMED ABOUT THE GRAVITY OF THIS PROBLEM FOR BANGLADESH AND THAT HE HAD EVEN DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH THE SOVIET EMBASSY. HE SAID THEY WERE CONSIDERING INVITING MCNAMARA OF THE WORLD BANK TO BANGLADESH TO APPRISE HIM OF THE URGENCY OF THE PROBLEM AND ASKED WHAT I THOUGHT, OFF THE RECORD, OF THIS IDEA. I TOLD HIM I DIDN'T LIKE TO GET INTO BANGLADESH'S INTERNAL QUESTIONS BUT THAT I THOUGHT THEY WOULD BE BEST ADVISED TO PURSUE THE MATTER BILATERALLY WITH INDIA SINCE ANY IMPRESSION THAT MCNAMARA WAS BEING INVITED FOR THIS PURPOSE WAS SURE TO BE SEEN IN INDIA AS A FORM OF PRESSURE WHICH MIGHT NOT BE HELPFUL. HE SAID HE COULD SEE THIS SIDE OF IT.

7. MULTILATERAL ISSUES. I TOLD THE FOREIGN SECRETARY THAT HE WOULD KNOW FROM OUR PAST DISCUSSIONS WITH HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE MINISTRY THAT WE WERE PAYING MORE ATTENTION NOW TO ISSUES IN THE MULTILATERAL FORA AND THE EFFECT THEY HAD ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES. WE WERE TRYING, I SAID, TO IMPROVE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAYS
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IN WHICH OTHER COUNTRIES ARRIVED AT THE ACTIONS THEY TOOK IN INSTITUTIONS LIKE THE UN AND WOULD THERE FORE BE IN MORE FREQUENT TOUCH IN THE COMING MONTHS ON SUCH MATTERS THAN PERHAPS WE HAD IN THE PAST. WE APPROACHED THIS DIALOGUE IN A CONSTRUCTIVE SPIRIT AND HOPED THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES WOULD SEE IT IN THE SAME WAY. FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THAT THEIR POLICY WAS VERY CLEAR IN THIS AREA: FIRST, THEY NEVER WISHED TO HARM THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIVIDUAL FRIENDLY COUNTRIES BUT, SECOND, IT WAS IMPORTANT TO THEM TO MAINTAIN THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES SINCE ANY DETERIORATION IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THESE COUNTRIES WAS NOT IN THE INTEREST OF BANGLADESH'S RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. I SAID WE DID UNDERSTAND THAT THERE WERE NO SIMPLISTIC ANSWERS TO SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS BUT THAT HE SHOULD APPRECIATE THE INCREASED ATTENTION WE WERE PAYING TO THIS AREA AND THAT "BLOC VOTING", IN WHICH THE MERITS OF THE ISSUE AT HAND OR THE REAL INTERESTS OF THE VOTING COUNTRY WERE IGNORED, WAS ONE OF THE PROBLEMS THAT CONCERNED US. WHEN FOREIGN SECRETARY IMPLIED HIS BELIEF THAT OUR POLICY IN THIS AREA WAS LARGELY THE WORK OF AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN, I SAID HE SHOULD NOT MISTAKE THE SUPPORT THIS POLICY HAD FROM OUR ADMINISTRATION AND OUR CONGRESS AS A WHOLE.

8. PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH RELATIONS. AS FOREIGN SECRETARY HAD TO LEAVE FOR ANOTHER APPOINTMENT, I TOLD HIM THAT I HAD ALSO HOPED TO CATCH UP ON THE STATE OF THEIR RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN BUT PERHAPS WE COULD RETURN TO THIS SUBJECT IN A WEEK OR SO. FROM HIS CRYPTIC REMARKS AS WE WENT TO THE DOOR, I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN SPECIAL CONVERSATIONS IN ISLAMABAD IN THE RECENT PAST WHICH THE FOREIGN SECRETARY INTERPRETED AS PROMISING. HE SAID THAT THERE AS A RECOGNITION ON BOTH SIDES THAT THEY NEEDED TO BUILD A GOOD RELATIONSHIP AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN "GOOD PROGRESS." HE DID ADD, HOWEVER, THAT PAKISTAN APPEARED TO BE DRAGGING ITS FEET ON TRADE QUESTIONS AND IMPLIED THAT THE ASSETS AND BIHARI QUESTIONS STILL LAY IN THE FUTURE.

9. COMMENT: THE DOMINANT ISSUE AND IRRITANT IN BANGLADESH-INDIAN RELATIONS, IT IS CLEAR FROM THIS AND OTHER RECENT
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CONVERSATIONS, HAD NOW BECOME THE FARAKKA BARRAGE. AND HERE THERE SEEMS SOME DANGER THAT THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT MAY BE DIGGING ITSELF INTO UNENVIABLE POSITON IN WHICH INDIA CAN POINT OUT THAT IT HAS QUITE REASONABLY OFFERED

TO TALK ABOUT THE QUESTION DIRECTLY WITH THE BANGLADESH
GOVERNMENT BUT THAT ITS OFFER HAS BEEN SPURNED. THE
FOREIGN SECRETARY APPEARED TO APPRECIATE THIS DILEMMA
WHEN I ASKED ABOUT IT TODAY BUT HE SEEMS TO BELIEVE THAT
HIS GOVERNMENT HAS LITTLE CHOICE FOR THE MOMENT BUT TO WAIT
AND HOPE FROM SOME PRELIMINARY INDIAN ACTION OF GOOD
FAITH IN THE DIVISION OF THE WATERS SINCE TO DO OTHERWISE --
AS HE PUT IT -- WOULD BE TO GO INTO THE TALKS WITH INDIA
"UNDER DURESS."
BOSTER

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